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Viewing cable 09BAKU172, IRANIAN FILM DIRECTOR ON IRANIAN ROCK, DRUGS, AND

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Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cable's unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#09BAKU172**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09BAKU172	2009-03-04 12:05	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Baku

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/04/17/112290/state-department-cables-reveal.html>

VZCZCXRO9123
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DE RUEHKB #0172/01 0631205
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R 041205Z MAR 09
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000172

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SUBJECT: IRANIAN FILM DIRECTOR ON IRANIAN ROCK, DRUGS, AND
MOVIE SCENE

Classified By: POLECON COUNSELOR ROB GARVERICK, REASON 1.5 (B and D)

Summary

11. (C) An Iranian film Director told Iran watcher that
Iranian society is becoming more liberal even as the regime

becomes more "backward." He described a widespread youth culture, embracing all regions and classes, in which underground rap and rock music bands are proliferating and "classic rock" connoisseurship growing. He also described widespread narcotics use, noting that recreational drugs are regarded as "cool" by many, while harder drugs offer escapism to many without other outlets. Despite the breadth of this problem, he doubted that the Iranian regime is ready to allow meaningful outside access, or otherwise engage the West in cooperative anti-narcotics activities. While noting that films can make good domestic profits, the Director noted many cumbersome aspects in producing and obtaining permission to release Iranian films, with some movies blocked from distribution after completion, or even withdrawn after release. End Summary.

Meeting with Iranian Movie Director

¶2. (C) On February 28 Baku Iran Watcher met with XXXXXXXXXXXX (protect). Although not internationally famous, the XXXXXXXXXXXX has produced seven feature films and a Persian-language Google produced several "hits." XXXXXXXXXXXX has an apartment in Baku, but primarily stays in Teheran. He has a brother living in Vienna, Virginia and agreed to meet with Iran watcher just prior to embarking on his first trip to the United States.

"Iranians Moving Forward; Regime Moving Backward"

¶3. (C) According to XXXXXXXXXXXX, "80-90 percent of the Iranian people have no problem with America;" compared to Russia, "we love you." While he said that the Iranian people have a "good feeling" about President Obama, he stressed that most people are focusing on their families and "how to survive" rather than U.S. or international politics. He characterized Iran as a society where "the people keep moving forward while the government is moving backward" on social liberalism and cosmopolitanism, and desire for international integration.

Underground Discos and Rock Bands

¶4. (C) He said that urban young people mix with ease in parties and get-togethers behind closed doors and said there is a proliferation of "artificial discos" operating out of private homes or specially rented non-descript-from-the-outside apartments. Bribes and hired guards are deployed as necessary, he added. Alcohol and narcotics are easy to obtain, and consumption of the latter is often regarded as "cool" among youth. He described most Iranian youth and young adults as "aimless and hopeless," in terms of their personal lives. He decried the lack of commonly-available sports facilities and programs and other constructive activities that might provide alternatives.

¶5. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXX said that he is currently working on a film about underground rock music bands in Iran, which he claimed are spreading in popularity, name recognition, and numbers. According to XXXXXXXXXXXX, young Iranians avidly keep up with the latest rock and rap music trends and are especially like heavy metal for its symbolic protest content. Young people also compete in assembling collections of classic rock, and some have formed unofficial fan clubs for old bands such as Pink Floyd and Led Zeppelin. He said that all this music is easy to obtain and download, and denied that Rock or Rap is only popular among pampered or urban youth: "I guarantee you that many youth and young adults in villages are also listening to it," he said.

Hollywood Films, "Persepolis" Popular

¶6. (C) Despite some widely felt outrage over the film "300" and its hugely distorted picture of ancient Iran, he said that Hollywood films (including classics) remain very popular. Although most such films cannot be shown in movie houses (or are censored if they are), he noted that DVDs for home watching are easy and cheap to get. He said that he himself has an "archive" of more than 300 American films. He added that the Marjane Satrapi animated film "Persepolis," which has been sharply condemned by the regime as "anti-Iran

and anti-Islam," is easy to find and "very popular."
"Anything the regime condemns immediately becomes desired and popular," he noted.

Narcotics -----

¶7. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX said that he has made a documentary about drug addiction in Iran, but has not yet obtained permission for its release. Siamizadeh estimated that over fifty percent of adult Iranians are at least "recreational" drug users (including opium and hashish); about twenty percent are seriously addicted, he claimed. As an example, he cited a restaurant owned by his family in Teheran with eight outside employees. All are regular narcotics users, and one is a heroin addict, he said. Asked if combating narcotics/drug addiction might be an area where the West could offer more cooperation with Iran, XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX opined that the Iranian government would resist any real substantial cooperation: "Some of them are involved in the (very lucrative) business, while others don't want foreigners to see how bad the situation is."

Movie Producing in Iran -----

¶8. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX is a graduate of the Art and Cinema University, which he said accepts thirty students a year and is the primary source of Iranian film, TV, and theater directors and key production staff. He said that a separate "public broadcasting" school trains students to be government news readers and "visual propagandists," subsequently employing most of them at the state TV network.

¶9. (C) He described the process of producing a film as cumbersome. After private financial backers are found, "five or six" different committees must approve scripts and the finished project before it can be released. He claimed that not infrequently finished or near-finished films are banned from public distribution, causing the loss of all the investment. Sometimes even released films are withdrawn. This threat promotes significant self-censorship by film producers and backers, he said. On the other hand, he said, if a film is released, general domestic demand is such that good profits can be earned.

¶10. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX is planning visits to Washington, New York and Los Angeles during his upcoming three week visit to the USA. He expressed modest interest in meeting some American filmmakers or visiting film facilities, but said that so far he had no arrangements to do so. He is also interested in finding out if there are any commercially viable outlets and/or financial support for Iranian films that might not receive permission for release in Iran. He is currently developing a scenario about a culturally-torn German-Iranian woman who after returning to Iran decides at the end to embrace her German vice her Iranian heritage.

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